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SUBJECT: DART WESTERN IRAQ UPDATE

SUMMARY

1. DART Field Team West participated in the daily Governorate Support Team meeting in Al Hillah on 25 May and offered updates of its governorate-level engagements, including support to rehabilitate a human-rights organization's new offices, the facilitation of Babil food distribution, coordination with and support of NGOs, refugee-return preparation, vulnerable-population oversight, and donations support. The DART later participated in a public distribution system meeting between WFP and the Ministry of Trade, and spoke to the governorate's labor and social affairs directors about vulnerable groups in Babil.

2. The DART visited Karbala on 26 May and found vibrant markets and crowded streets, but also heard reports of a destroyed sewage system, insecurity, the lack of sufficient power supply, and a scarcity of drugs and equipment in the city's hospitals. The DART attended Karbala's "city council" meeting, visited with WFP and MOT local staffs, talked to doctors at a hospital, and met with the newly created Human Rights Society. End Summary

FOOD DISTRIBUTION ISSUES

3. The DART met with U.N. World Food Program (WFP) and Ministry of Trade (MOT) representatives in Al Hillah on 25 May to discuss the June ration distribution, bringing up several issues requiring follow-up action. WFP and MOT are reorganizing the food stocks at the main food warehouse in Al Hillah and will conduct a stock inventory over the next few days to determine actual stocks on hand and shortages. WFP said that wheat flour, rice, sugar, tea, and soap are in stock, but that it was unsure of the extent of shortages of vegetable oil, pulses and other commodities.

4. MOT expressed interest in the DART's proposal to involve MOT security personnel in the ongoing security training program offered by Coalition civil-military officials. MOT will provide civil-military personnel with the names, positions, and locations of MOT security personnel working at the warehouse and the silo. The DART will monitor to ensure this group is included in the training.

5. The MOT mentioned a new bureaucratic procedure that complicated the procurement of spare parts for silo equipment. According to the Al Hillah silo manager, the Al Hillah governor had changed the MOT's procedures and has insisted that MOT request the governor's approval of spare part expenditures. MOT said this procedure added at least five days to the procurement time for spare parts, potentially creating a large bottleneck at the silo if a breakdown occurred during a convoy delivery. DART will raise the issue with the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA) and civil-military officials to determine its validity and, if necessary, to develop a course of corrective action.

6. The MOT mentioned that under the former public distribution system, certain silo and warehouse employees were paid 1,000 dinar of additional pay for working on holidays, weekends, or during surge periods when large shipments arrived and longer hours were required. An MOT silo manager said this amount had not been included in the new MOT budget lists. DART will raise this issue with ORHA and civil-military officials.

VULNERABLE POPULATIONS IN AL HILLAH

17. Residents of Al Hillah would welcome returning refugees who fled in 1991, according to the labor director of Al Hillah's Ministry of Labor and Social Services. However, he does not expect refugee returns soon because of insecurity and uncertainty in Iraq. "They will be shocked to see the hard circumstances when they return," he said. The labor director also said that the greatest labor problems in Al Hillah were electricity shortages, insecurity, and organized labor disruptions. He said the main employers in Al Hillah were mills, garment and plastics factories, a biscuit factory, car repair shops, and electrical utilities, and that all were experiencing low productivity. Employees will soon receive their first post-war salaries, and all have been given their USD 20 emergency payment.

18. The director of social services oversees Al Hillah's two orphanages (one for boys, one for girls), the houses for the deaf and mentally handicapped, a kindergarten, and services for 3,700 poor families comprised of widows, the elderly, or the blind. He said the former regime gave these families their last quarterly payment of 15,000 to 22,500 dinars in December. The Director is not sure when the Coalition will offer them their next "salaries." His social workers have not been able to identify additional vulnerable families after the war because they have been consumed with salary issues. The 3,700 families and the institutionalized residents traditionally received food through the public distribution system, but he did not know when they would receive their next rations. The non-governmental organization (NGO) Enfants du Monde delivered food to all of the city's institutional residents four days ago.

19. The Director gave three recommendations to improve services to vulnerable residents of Al Hillah: 1) immediately give the 3,700 poor families their "salaries;" 2) install air-conditioning in the city's institutions; and 3) provide bus service to social service workers and the handicapped. He also said the threat of insecurity continued to deter girls from returning to institutions, including the girls orphanage that lies empty.

KARBALA'S OBSTETRICS AND GYNECOLOGICAL HOSPITAL

10. In this 120-bed hospital, approximately 120 to 150 women visit the outpatient department daily and 50 enter the inpatient department. Twenty-eight doctors work at this hospital, which had been converted from a social club before sanctions were imposed. According to the two doctors with whom the DART spoke, the main problems for women in Karbala include anemia, malnutrition, and complications with delivery.

11. During and immediately after the war, many women suffered from premature labor and preclampsia, and of the 10 to 15 children born per day, two to three have congenital anomalies. This hospital seems to face many similar problems to those encountered in other hospitals in the region. Many patients cannot pay hospital fees, there is a lack of essential drugs (no drugs have been received by the Ministry of Health (MOH) storehouse since before the war), and a scarcity of equipment (oxygen, masks, disposable gloves, catheters, etc.).

12. Security continues to be a problem. Thieves tried to steal three of the hospital's cars in the last few days. Other problems include a shortage of electrical power with only three to four hours of electricity per day, causing the hospital to be dependent on a backup generator. The hospital has received small-scale assistance from the Coalition (repainting of the lobby), and has not met with any international organizations thus far.

13. Of note, one of the women doctors explained that there had been two patients in the last week who had reportedly been raped. No specifics were shared. According to the doctor, rape was very rare in the past. She worries that the security situation of women and girls around town will worsen before it improves.

HUMAN RIGHTS SOCIETY IN KARBALA

14. The Human Rights Society in Karbala is comprised of 60 male members, including volunteers. The group was formed from members of the Lawyers' Union after the fall of the former regime. The society is using the old youth association building until they find a more permanent place for its headquarters, which may turn out to be the Lawyers' Union building. It does not have office equipment and is using a borrowed computer to conduct daily business.

The staff's work includes demining, mass graves follow-up, locating missing soldiers, and recording war damages for future compensation. The Society reported that more than 500 homes were destroyed in Karbala during the war, with 200 people injured.

15. The society is using local television and is beginning a newsletter to educate the local community about its work. According to two of the members, there are 29 mass graves in the surrounding area. Of those, five have been unearthed. However, as a consequence of Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Husseini Al-Sistani's (a revered Shia religious leader) decree requesting that these graves not be disturbed, the remaining graves have been left untouched in the hope that international forensics teams can begin work on them. The society members are attempting to secure these sites themselves but are seeking more guidance and assistance on this issue.

INSECURITY IN KARBALA

16. A need for greater security in Karbala was emphasized time and again at Monday's "City Council" meeting attended by 12 councilors, the governor, the DART, and eight military officials. The military officials included the Karbala "military governor," and the heads of the governorate support team (GST) and the civil-military operations center (CMOC), who responded to councilors' pleas for assistance and information. In addition to insecurity, officials noted scarcities of gas, liquid propane gas (LPG), and electricity.

17. The Religion Councilor proposed a livelihoods plan to employ individuals to remove trash from the streets and communities. He complained about abysmal conditions at the police station's jail, calling it "unsuitable for an animal." The CMOC representatives responded by saying the police received USD 15,000 on 26 May to begin the jail's rehabilitation. The Religion Councilor also pointedly asked the CMOC representatives why he was being investigated by the Coalition. "I made it clear to them," he said, "that I don't lean toward violence." The military governor assured him his case would likely be resolved soon, and that a political vetting process was necessary.

18. The meeting of the councilors, all men, lasted two hours and was held in a large meeting room. During the meeting, a Karbala television reporter arrived and videotaped portions of the proceedings.

19. Starting on 26 May, the Karbala CMOC opened a permanent office in the city hall. The CMOC is responsible for coordinating the agriculture and fuel sectors, as well as for interacting with NGOs. The GST, jointly run by the Marines and Army, covers all other sectors, including health, water and sanitation, and justice. The GST said the sewage plant was destroyed during the war when 750,000 liters of diesel fuel were deliberately pumped into the system. It remains down, as does one of the city's two electrical grids. The CMOC director said he was aware of NGO activities by Save the Children, the International Rescue Committee, and another agency that had done water interventions at the city's hospitals.

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DELAYS IN KARBALA, AL HILLAH FOOD DISTRIBUTIONS
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20. The DART visited WFP/Karbala on 26 May to discuss issues related to the 1 June distributions. WFP stated that as of 26 May, the Karbala main food warehouse was short of vegetable oil, pulses, adult milk, salt, and weaning cereal. WFP/Karbala reported that WFP international staff announced that a delayed distribution start date of around 7 June might be necessary to allow for additional commodities to arrive to complete the ration. (Note: The recently announced ration by the central MOT does not include adult milk, salt, or weaning cereal due to nationwide shortages. End Note.)

21. According to WFP/Karbala, the MOT ration/registration Center, the Grain Board, the Monitoring Office, and the Food Store are all operational and ready for an early June distribution. A second report of unexploded ordnance (UXO) discovered at the food warehouse has been filed with the CMOC, and military officials said the UXO would be assessed shortly. WFP claimed that this UXO did not pose a threat to present stocks, workers, or distributions.

22. Security drive-bys and visits by CMOC personnel have increased noticeably. While security could still be improved, WFP felt that the increased presence was making a positive impact on the security in the area. WFP/Karbala reported no problems with the grain silo or mills. In Al Hillah, WFP confirmed the possibility of a delayed

start date for June distribution. Both governorates are awaiting instructions from WFP management. DART continues to work with CMOC/Al Hillah to reduce gate searches at the main food warehouse and to allow WFP employees and vehicle access to the facility without searches.

123. Neither WFP/Karbala nor WFP/Al Hillah had noticed assistance from Save the Children or the Norwegian Refugee Council, the WFP partners in these two governorates. WFP/Karbala said the Salvation Army expressed interest in meeting with WFP representatives to discuss assisting them with supplemental food distributions for orphanages, hospitals, and other institutions for the vulnerable. Team West will monitor this possible activity.

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